

BERKELEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education
1231 Addison St., Berkeley, CA 94702
510-644-6206

Official Minutes
November 4, 2020

President Judy Appel called the meeting to order at 7:11pm. She reported that the Board convened to Closed Session at 5:30pm.

Roll Call

Board of Education:

Judy Appel, President – Present
Ty Alper, Vice President – Present
Ka'Dijah Brown, Director/Clerk – Present
Beatriz Leyva-Cutler, Director – Present
Julie Sinai, Director -- Present
Miles Miller, Student Director, BHS – Present

Administration:

Brent Stephens, Ed., D, Superintendent
Baje Thiara, Associate Superintendent, Educational Services
Pauline Follansbee, IAssistant Superintendent, Business Services
Samantha Tobias-Espinosa, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources
Lyz Chairez, Recorder

OPEN SESSION

APPROVAL OF REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

At the request of President Appel, item 11.5 , Approval of MOU with Lifelong, Kids Village, was pulled from the agenda.

Motion to approve agenda as amended:
Brown/Alper and unanimously approved 6-0.

REPORT CLOSED SESSION

President Appel reported out on closed session:

Anticipated Litigation – Regarding costs of services provided to student - Ed. Code § 54956.9, subd. (e)(2)

BUSD Case No. 202021-15

The Board heard an update; no action was taken.

Collective Bargaining - Government Code Section 54957.6(a) (District Negotiator: Samantha Tobias-Espinosa)

BCCE

The Board heard an update; no action was taken.

BFT

The Board heard an update; no action was taken.

LOCAL 21

The Board heard an update; no action was taken.

UBA

The Board heard an update; no action was taken.

Public Employment (Government Code Section 54957)

Superintendent Evaluation

The Board discussed. no action was taken.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

A total of 29 people addressed the Board:

Five comments from students in support of reopening schools.

One comment inquiring what will happen with current reopening plans if COVID cases spike as predicted.

Ten comments in support of reopening schools.

Nine comments in opposition to reopening schools and in-person instruction

one comment in opposition to reopening middle schools as a hybrid model

Two comments in support of immediate reopening of elementary schools.

One comment suggesting that the priority be placed on making distance learning work.

UNION COMMENTS

BFT Vice President Janine Waddell congratulated newly elected Board members Ana Vasudeo and Laura Babitt. She reported that BFT is currently working with elementary schools on creating an effective hybrid model that works for students and teachers. To this end, BFT has scheduled a series of meetings for the purpose of brainstorming ideas for a hybrid model. Teachers are taking a thoughtful approach with student needs at the center of the conversation. Ms. Waddell shared some of the thoughts and questions expressed by BFT members as they consider different goals, all of which are student centered, but impossible to implement with the current resources available. There is a reason why the only California schools that have reopened are in rural areas, part of wealthy school districts or are private schools. New York City reopened schools with a hybrid model and did a good job at getting the buildings ready, but did not put as much thought into how the education would actually work. We have in place a great health and safety agreement. Now, it's important to apply as much effort into planning what childrens' days will actually look like, both at school and remotely. Meanwhile, it is important to remember that the virus is still in our community and it spreads when people gather. Our own school community lost a parent to COVID-19 this week. BUSD cannot afford to make mistakes when the cost is too high.

BOARD MEMBER AND SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

President Appel thanked all who spoke tonight and congratulated Ana Vasudeo and Laura Babbitt on their election victory. She then yielded her time to Ms. Vasudeo, who shared her excitement for the opportunity to serve Berkeley schools on the School Board. She thanked Berkeley voters for electing two parent leaders of color to serve during this challenging time. She also thanked President Appel and Director Leyva-Cutler for their years of service on the School Board. She looks forward to working with our schools to help navigate them through this challenging time.

Vice President Alper thanked the community for its wide range of perspectives, all of which were heartfelt, compelling and demonstrative of the complexity of the issues we are facing. He agreed with the many comments pointing out the real harms being imposed on members of our community no matter what we do. Reopening schools poses a public health risk. Keeping kids home also puts at risk their mental health and well being. Ultimately, we all have the same goal to reopen schools. He respectfully disagreed with the suggestion that we are rejecting science. Health officials and science are informing the safety measures that must be put in place before we can reopen. Dr. Stephens will further describe the complexities involved with reopening. He recognized that staff is working diligently to meet the Jan 13 target date, and expressed urgency to simultaneously begin plans for middle and high school.

Director Leyva-Cutler thanked Vice President Alper for his remarks and echoed his sentiment. We are hearing directly from our students and are actively working to meet their needs in the safest way possible. She also congratulated Ana Vasudeo and Laura Babitt for being elected to the School Board.

Student Director Miller gave a shout out to all the student poll workers. He also thanked the students who spoke during this evening's public comment. He shared that as the student representative on the Board he aims to share the voice of his peers, and tries not to focus on his individual experience as much. But he wanted to address the assumption that high school students are the least affected by distance learning. He said that while this may be true for some, it is not the case for all. There are some barriers that simply cannot be overcome with remote learning, and it is difficult to wake up daily to the isolation that comes with it. It is important that vulnerable students be put in a place where they can learn successfully, and when the time is right, be able to bring back as many students as possible back to a successful learning environment.

Director Brown thanked everyone who came out tonight to speak. She also congratulated Laura Babitt and Ana Vasudeo on being elected to the School Board.

Director Sinai appreciated all the students and community members who expressed a range of opinions and passions this evening. She added that we are in the middle of a pandemic and public health does say that schools can reopen once all required safety and health measures are in place. We must abide by testing, contact tracing, and social distancing. BUSD is actively working with union partners in preparation for a safe January reopening. She looks forward to seeing this conversation unfold with a strategic approach aimed at making this work for all students and families.

Superintendent Stephens congratulated and welcomed Ana Vasudeo and Laura Babitt to the Board. He let President Appel and Director Leyva-Cutler know that he is looking forward to the last coming meetings. Even now their leadership is evident. Tonight the Board will be voting on a policy championed by Director Leyva-Cutler in support of non-sweat procurement by the District. In the coming weeks the Board will also be voting on a policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming students that has been championed by President Appel. To the students, families and teachers who took the time to participate this evening, he said that staff and the Board are listening closely. What continues to stand out is a sense of sensitivity for the student perspective and for their experience with ZOOM as expressed by Director Miller. He encouraged the viewing audience to remain engaged for the forthcoming update that will detail plans for this Monday when the first small cohorts return to campus for in-person instruction as a beginning effort towards reopening.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Motion to approve the Consent Calendar:
Alper/Miller and unanimously approved 6-0.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Update on School Reopening, Pre-K and Elementary Schools

Director of BSEP and Community Relations reported that based on the California Tier System, we are in the orange or “moderate” area, down two levels from the purple or “widespread” tier where we were in the summer when this tracking system was first introduced. At the county level, there is a 3.7% positivity rate, and a 1.1% positivity rate at the city level. While as a state we have lower and relatively stable numbers, there are surges happening nationally, and there is concern for further surges as we head into the winter months. Equally concerning is the manner in which this pandemic has exacerbated inequities in our society.

Superintendent Stephens reminded the viewing audience of the Board’s approval to begin the district’s phased reopening by focusing first on small cohort support beginning November 9. He also reiterated that all planning is contingent on community transmission rates remaining stable or continuing to decline.

Phase 1 is scheduled to begin on November 9 at Rosa Parks, Malcolm X and Jefferson with 8-student cohorts and 1-2 staff members. Cohorts were selected by elementary COST teams. Phase 1B includes an expansion from 8-student to up to 14-student cohorts. This first phase will be supported by 7 classified and 4 certificated staff who voluntarily agreed to come in to provide in-person support to students. Phase 2 has a January 13 target date for ECE and grades TK-2 to return on a hybrid model whose details are still to be negotiated. Phase 2B introduces grades 3-5 back to campus via the hybrid model, on January 20. In response to parents’ questions about why the district is still bargaining, Dr. Stephens explained that the district is engaging in ongoing efforts to resolve issues with the new distance learning model, including grading, parent conferences, assessments, special education, and support for English learners. There have also been changes to state laws about attendance since the summer. Questions and discussion followed.

Update on School Reopening, Middle and High Schools

Dr. Stephens reported that significant progress has been made with the return of student athletes to BHS campus. The new conditioning program was approved by both BUSD and the City of Berkeley. BUSD’s Reopening Readiness Dashboard will be revisited for the purpose of modifying it to include middle and high schools. Some key differences to consider between elementary schools and middle and high schools include students switching from teacher to teacher and typically crowded passing periods. Dr. Stephens shared the planning assumptions that need to be addressed in the development of the hybrid model. One assumption considers the possibility that local public health conditions may deteriorate. Therefore, a hybrid learning model should permit students and teachers to move as easy as possible back into distance learning. Another assumption takes into account that families and students value their current relationship with their teachers. Therefore, a hybrid mode should maintain current teachers, classes and students groups as much as possible. A series of upcoming town hall meetings have been scheduled for continued updates to the community on BUSD’s hybrid learning model. Questions and discussion followed.

EXTENDED PUBLIC COMMENT

One comment disagreeing with the reversal of grading system back to letter grade.

One comment thanking the Board for considering using outdoor spaces as a way to move reopening plans forward.

One comment in support of educators work groups.

One comment on challenges distance learning poses on families and in support of reopening schools.

Two comments in opposition to opening schools

One comment asking why Berkeley schools did not open in October following the County's approval to do so

ADJOURNMENT

9:22PM